

**With reference to two different countries,
compare and contrast how key political
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To compare and contrast how key political agenda and cultural perceptions of children impact on the quality of early childhood provision, Norway and Kenya will be referenced with support from relevant theories, policies and literature. For the purpose of this paper, the role of government in provision of healthcare, gender equality and eradication of poverty will be explored to ensure effective early childhood education and care (ECEC). Consideration will be given to the impact of the environment through differences in provision and access to education between rural and urban communities. Furthermore, the significance of understanding the value of ECEC in a global context as well as the importance of undergraduates awareness of global issues will be examined through the discussion of key political, social and cultural factors that shape early childhood provision.

The value of understanding approaches to ECEC is described by Bartram (2018) as a diverse enquiry to develop concise and critical awareness of contextual factors that influence educational practices in varied global contexts. Equally, Marshall (2019) highlights the importance of the evolution of global education systems because it humanises comparisons that cannot be found within statistics, surveys and competitive league tables. Moreover, it is important to contextualise the historical journey of provision to understand where and why such provision has come to be. The traditional and contemporary views of ECEC and curricular pedagogy for Kenya and Norway will be discussed to develop an overview of each countries approach to early childhood education.

Traditionally, childhood within a Norwegian context reflects cultural beliefs of the intrinsic value associated with childhood as a phase of life. Moreover, Davis and Elliot (2014) emphasise the link between early childhood education and life-long learning for sustainability. Correspondingly, The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent an agenda for united nations through a global partnership to address inequalities seen in areas such as; poverty, healthcare, education and gender. By committing to tackle the goals, the United Nations can work in partnership to enable a sustainable future for generations to come (United Nations, 2020). Links between quality ECEC and education for sustainability within Norway are supported by the United Nations Convention for The rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) in advocating children as active agents and rights to participation over decisions that affect them. To this end, education is promoted for sustainability and is globally exemplified as transformative via the SDGs to ensure “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning for all” (UN, 2016, p.1). However, Davis and Elliot (2014) highlight restrictions in adopting a global approach to early education for sustainability because of limitations in understanding variations in lived experiences. To this end, Gradovski et al., (2020) refer to cultural and political embedded beliefs that shape a countries approach and value associated with ECEC. For example, Norway as a developed country, has long held beliefs in the rights to participation for children grounded in legislation (Kindergarten Act, 2005). However, although Kenya’s improved legislation to reflect the rights of the child via The Children’s Act (2001) demonstrates intent to seek support and improve ECEC, both cultural and political risk factors such as; poverty, climate change, healthcare and gender equality (as part of a developing country) limit the pace of progress in comparison to Norway. This is why the SDGs are important in educating governments and populations towards sustainable futures for all, particularly due to the interlinking factors associated with the SDGs. For example, poor healthcare can push societies into poverty which then in turn become less productive which can lead to threats to food availability and increases in preventable diseases. Therefore, addressing similarities and differences through political approaches to ECEC enables an analysis of traditional and contemporary pedagogical frameworks and practices.

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To address similarities and differences in how policy agenda is reflected between Kenya and Norway consideration will be given to governmental spending, the type of provision provided and the training of professionals within ECEC. This is important because policy, professionalism and government action is reflected in the socially constructed perceptions of childhood and can reveal how those in power see the place of the child which in turn informs policy and practice surrounding such socially constructed views. To this end, Marshall (2019) alludes to the impact from the social construction of childhood in terms of understanding global education by examining the influence of the cultural context in which it takes place and how global educational experiences differ for children around the world. Moreover, Gradovski et al (2020) suggest that critically analysing policy can reveal a countries embedded belief about the value attached to early childhood.

To this end, Norway has a traditional view of children's rights to autonomy over their learning and participation evident within legislation and curricular policy. Similarly, Nganga (2009) draws attention to Kenya's governmental agenda through the analysis of key documentation and funding regarding ECEC. Notably, the Kenyan government expects high-quality ECEC, reflected through the Children's Act (2001) to meet children's holistic needs to reach their full potential. Moreover, viewing children holistically through child-centred practices supported via legislation is evident in both countries where ECEC is seen to potentially empower and support families, achieved through strengthening community-based management of ECEC.

This is evident in Norway through funding for kindergartens from the state and municipalities. According to OECD (2019), Norway is one of the top countries in terms of spending on education with an increase of 9% spending on primary education between 2010-2016. Accordingly, Petitclerc et al (2017) highlight how rare Norway's spending on ECEC (which has exceeded 1% of GDP) is, and associate such spending as linked to higher rates of ECEC use. Moreover, generous subsidies aimed at free places for all children in Norway are reflected within policy to increase employment (particularly notable is the high proportion of women employed in Norway) and the uniqueness of state funding in Norway for both private and public kindergartens. Alternatively, although the Kenyan government works closely with Non-Government organisations (NGOs) to implement ECEC, government funding within this area is lacking. This does not mean that education is not valued within a Kenyan context, on the contrary, rapid growth in primary education (free for all) is suggested by Piper et al (2018) as reflective of the focus for government investment (currently at 5.3% GDP for education as a whole). Moreover, Nganga (2009) asserts that increasing recognition evident in Kenya towards the role of ECEC and attempts to tackle limited amounts of preschools are being made to meet the rising demand.

Thus the introduction of early years teacher status is suggested by Mbugua (2012) as reflective of the growth being seen within ECEC in Kenya and the view that education is key to development and sustainable living. Alternatively, Piper et al (2018) warn of discernible differences across Kenya in terms of provision, particularly between rural and urban communities. Further highlighting hidden costs of education such as resources, poor infrastructure and teachers wages (which are largely community funded). Moreover, disparities in wealth distribution have led to differences in class ratios and sizes compared to private schools within Kenya and the country wide provision seen in Norway. Likewise, Norway has 60% higher expenditure on primary teachers' salaries per child than the OECD average (OECD, 2019). Attendance figures that demonstrate a 97% share of children enrolled in ECEC for 2019, contrasts with Kenya's share of just 16% (UNICEF, 2020). Hence, Belmonte-Martin and Tufte (2017) discuss how the Norwegian model aims to benefit all with an emphasis on quality and support for families. Whereas Muthanje

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et al (2019), critique the structure of the Kenyan education system and the governments focus on primary investment to the detriment of ECEC, resulting in poor quality training for teachers, a lack of resources and infrastructure.

Likewise, the high uptake of ECEC places within a Norwegian context is suggestive of trust in the legal systems and policies. Equally Hovdelien (2014) suggests the Kindergarten Act (2005) as indicative of an inclusive and multi-cultural ECEC which demonstrates equality without imposing uniformity. The framework for Kindertgartens values children's cultural backgrounds and promote inclusiveness through respect for difference. To this end, Haug (2014) discusses how ECEC is used to address societal problems by balancing cultural identity against developing a society that strives for common, values, rules and goals. Furthermore, Obee et al (2020) suggest that cultural beliefs of parents impact on their decisions regarding ECEC and the value attached to it. To this end, Obee et al (2020) review that child-led, heuristic play is encapsulated within Norwegian culture through programmes such as Forest School implemented via an outdoor curricula framework that is supportive of risky play and reflective of a less risk adverse society compared to other westernised nations.

Alternatively, Kenya according to Pupala and Kascak (2020) is being pressured to transform ECEC within a neoliberalism context that may include policies that are not reflective of the best interests of the child because of pressures to meet global performativity standards. Pupala and Kascak (2020) argue that formal assessment based curricular implementation is a requirement for receiving funding from the World Bank. This leads to questions regarding the efficacy associated with external agency involvement in the deployment of educational policies in developing countries in terms of who education is for and its purpose. Notably, Wang and Yeh (2005), assert that through the globalisation and hybridisation of education, cultural distinctiveness is lost in favour of a marketized glossy product sold by wealthy, powerful nations to poorer, developing countries as the solution for future economic sustainability. To illustrate, Wang and Yeh (2005) adopt the analogy of a Disney production that reduces cultural content to increase the reach of the product and make it more appealing globally.

Similarly, it is not just developing countries that are being colonised by international agendas for ECEC, European countries such as Norway are under pressure to move away from child-led rights to participation in favour of social investment policies. Interestingly, King (2006) warns that the education sector of a country alone cannot deliver all the associated benefits of schooling without other factors such as; an enabling environment, healthcare, eradication of poverty and infrastructure being prioritised for government spending to make the most of an investment in education, which strongly links to the interrelationship with the SDGs. Furthermore, King (2006), through a study that looked at international influences in ECEC curriculum in developing countries concluded that because of dependence on external funding from NGOs such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, a conflict between policies for the nation, against the influence of international agenda can arise, stating; "Kenyan policy or policy for Kenya" (p.359). Furthermore, King (2006) asserts that dependence on such funding enables external agencies to control educational policies that may not be reflective of the culture of a country. Likewise, Ndomoto (2018) stresses that using data to develop international approaches towards quality ECEC ignores what is happening within countries culturally, financially and socially. Moreover, Ndomoto (2018) uses the analogy of a bicycle to emphasise this point by saying that giving people a bicycle to access resources is irrelevant and useless if you have not taught them how to ride it. To this end, Ndomoto (2018) suggests that ECEC policies in Kenya can be seen to be national

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versions of international colonial requirements rather than reflections of actual national concerns. The findings of King (2006) are supported by Ndomoto (2018) and suggest conflict surrounding the development of ECEC programmes within Norway and Kenya are still very current.

Furthermore, Otterstad and Braathe (2016), reviewed ECEC in Norway as part of the Norwegian welfare system and raised concerns over the public-private partnerships where government and private resources are combined. Concern centred around the large investments in ECEC sector which led to critique about its quality. The upsurge in the demand for quality staff within ECEC in Norway has been suggested by Karila (2012) as reflective of pressure on the Nordic Model arising from globalisation and a standardising world. Bartram (2018) defines globalisation as pressure between countries to adopt policies that seemingly yield better results and can be seen as powerful, wealthy countries influencing educational systems through their economic advantage. To this end, there is evidence as suggested by Karila (2012) of a standardised international approach to ECEC emerging within Norway and Kenya that is reflected in more formalised frameworks and policies towards life-long learning and school readiness practices.

Furthermore, Bartram (2018) contributes the world culturalist view in that the increasing convergence of educational frameworks are reflective of common agendas such as autonomy, child participation rights and democracy as valued globally. However, Giardiello (2019) argues that although persuasive global arguments for standardised approaches to ECEC are enticing, they must be evaluated critically rather than “seeing different approaches as a blueprint that can be exported and copied” (p.4). To illustrate this discussion further, how ECEC addresses social perceptions in terms of poverty, health and gender equality within Kenyan and Norwegian contexts will now be evaluated.

Authors such as Mbugua (2004) highlight the multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature that makes up the population in Kenya and applaud Kenya as the only African nation with an established early childhood education programme. However, with life expectancy of only forty-eight years and four times the share of people living in poverty within rural communities as opposed to cities such as Nairobi, Kenya’s delivery of quality ECEC can be seen to be varied.

Accordingly, Ng’asike (2019) communicates how the life of nomadic, pastoralist rural people known as the Turkana are affected by the colonial influence of a westernised curriculum evident within Kenya. Moreover, Ng’asike (2019) questions the cultural relevance of Western ideology suggesting it does not meet the Turkana people’s needs or way of life. This is because Turkana communities have historical cultural practices reliant on farming, hunting and abilities to predict climate changes that support their nomadic lifestyle out in desert terrains. School readiness and assessment-based learning delivered in English (not their mother tongue) is questioned in terms of marginalising their historical roots in attempts to cover syllabuses that are unfamiliar and potentially leads to children as passive recipients of information. Furthermore, Ng’asike (2019) suggests colonial influences from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund that the Kenyan government relies on for funding, favours the wealthy political elite which views Turkana lifestyle as lacking in modernity and resistant to change. According to Marshall (2019), the evident increase in westernised formal curriculums is reflected within Human Capital Theory whereby money is invested in education to increase skills related to an individual’s “productivity in the labour market” (p.65) and put simply, views people as resources for future economic growth. Furthermore, Bartram (2018) critiques the marketisation of education as disadvantaging the poor

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and widening societal inequalities. Alternatively, Norway according to Gradovski et al (2020) acknowledges global pressures related to the marketisation of education but remains committed to educating children, regardless of their background to live a life that reflects the culture of their upbringing. Moreover, Kenya and Norway's approach to dealing with the interrelationship between poverty, gender and healthcare that are prioritised within the SDGs reveals key information pertaining to the importance and value placed on each.

Within a Norwegian context, ECEC is promoted as the foundation for addressing sustainability issues through the varied cultural relationships and impact on the environment that decisions made now have on the future. Moreover, Davis and Elliot (2014) suggest sustainability is about "fairness and justice for all" (p.28) which include future generations as they have rights too. To this end, Norway is committed to tackling both gender and poverty inequalities. Obee et al (2020) suggest that Norway is one of the most active OECD countries in tackling gender equality policies. The National Commission on Gender Equity in Education (2018) looked at international approaches to gender equality as part of the SDGs. The findings suggested that in many countries such as Kenya, the gender gap favoured boys. However, In Norway, it was found that girls were more likely to have a higher level of achievement than boys and a high proportion of women are in the Norwegian workforce. Furthermore, OECD (2018) states that Norway is committed to learning from other countries to close their gender gap. A Bonds Study (MoE,2018) found that socioeconomic status within Norway was associated with gender disparities. In particular, immigrant minorities were presented as a risk factor for gender inequality. This is because gaps emerge largely after ECEC when more formalised curriculums are implemented which require a good standard of language for success. Many migrant children are not being taught in their first language and endure difficulties in reading and writing. The curricular continuity between ECEC and primary is a current focus for attempting to close this gender and poverty gap in Norway. Similarities in Kenya exist in terms of an upsurge in women in the labour market (Mbugua, 2012). However, gender inequalities present in favour of boys. Onwami (2011) suggests a direct correlation with poverty for gender disparities found in Kenya because of risk factors such as hidden costs to education (uniforms, resources), access (safety concerns associated with journey's to school) and traditional role of girls in being caretakers to siblings, early marriages and pregnancies. Moreover, Muthanje et al (2020) link gender and poverty in terms of poor infrastructure and access to education in poorer (particularly rural communities) and highlight the Kenyan's governmental struggle to meet the rising demand for ECEC, suggesting economic issues of government contribute to gender inequality and poverty. Equally, Piper et al (2018) suggest over investment in construction can lead to lack of resources and training for teachers which Kenya, as a lower-middle income country has vastly different provisions based on government funding between rural and urban communities. Moreover, Muthanje et al (2020) suggest when using education to close the gender and poverty gap, attention must be paid to the prioritisation of the healthcare of the nation.

Healthcare in Kenya is subsidised to enable access for the poor. However, Ndomoto et al (2018) found disparities between rural and urban access to healthcare. The social cultural context of communities was found to be ignored in terms of a lack of infrastructure to link communities to healthcare facilities, long travel requirements, advice often not given in native language resulting in poverty being a major barrier to sustainable healthy living for all. Alternatively, Norway spends approximately 1% GDP on healthcare which is largely tax funded and free for under sevens. Furthermore, Petitclerc et al (2017) refer to Norway's health regime as a family centred, that respects quality of life for all regardless of gender, socioeconomic status or background. In contrast, the overwhelmingly young population of Kenya has called for increased priority given to

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education within a health context for sustainable living. In particular, Hirari (2020) studied links to preventable diseases and child mortality in Kenya, discovering diarrhoea to be the leading cause of death in under-fives. The strong link between poverty and poor health is highlighted by Mugoya and Mutua (2015) as an environmental risk factor that needs addressing. Segev et al (2017) suggest cultural practices that are embedded in Kenyan psyche and passed on through generations such as geophagia (the deliberate ingestion of rocks and soil) particularly during pregnancy can cause severe health issues and are highlighted as part of the need to embed health and nutritional content within education and reflect the interlinking nature of the SDGs, whereby one cannot be met without addressing the others.

To conclude, reflecting on the impact of researching approaches to education within Kenya and Norway, it can be seen that they are grounded within sociocultural contexts that undergraduates need to be aware of to interpret what is happening and why. In particular, attention needs to be paid to government priorities often found in spending allocations and interlinking factors that affect the wellbeing of a population. Factors such as; healthcare, gender equality, poverty and approaches to indigenous communities as well as disparities found within urban and rural provision of education can reveal how some countries approaches to tackling risk factors are more effective than others. Moreover, reflecting on variations in global approaches to ECEC help undergraduates to maintain an interrogative approach and an awareness that lived experiences of communities cannot be replicated via those that are not experiencing it. But research goes some way to helping towards gain a better understanding of international practices as part of a global world.

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